

THE ENGLISH ASSOCIATION

Pamphlet No. 73

Colloquial Language of  
the Commonwealth and  
Restoration

BY

MARGARET WILLIAMSON, Ph.D.

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## COLLOQUIAL LANGUAGE OF THE COMMONWEALTH AND RESTORATION

A STUDY of the Personal Letters and Private Diaries of this period, undertaken with a view to research into its mental outlook, revealed linguistic points which seemed too valuable to be neglected. They are therefore collected here. They have been drawn from both published and manuscript sources, a list of which is given at the end for purposes of reference.<sup>1</sup> In the selection of sources from the immense mass of correspondence of the time, the intimate and personal has been chosen in preference to the letters of business or state. Personal Letters and Private Diaries are invaluable as a source of information on the colloquial language of any given period. Simple, vigorous and unadorned, they are our nearest approach to everyday speech as practised by those who wrote not for fame nor with any suspicion of the prying eyes of posterity, but from the necessity of finding straightforward expression for feelings, opinions, or daily happenings. Modern authority has it that in the early Stuart age

few men and women . . . sat down to write a letter without the desire of leaving it, when done, a finished production in the way of style.<sup>2</sup>

But this legacy of the Elizabethan age had, by 1640, lost much of its force, and indeed as early as 1625 Howell can declare:

we should write as we speak, and that's a true familiar letter which expresseth one's mind, as if he were discoursing with the party to whom he writes in succinct and short terms. The tongue and the pen are both of them interpreters of the mind, but I hold the pen to be the more faithful of the two.<sup>3</sup>

Such a statement is not altogether consistent with Howell's own letters, which seem to aim rather at literary polish and ornament than at the effect of conversational familiarity. Further testimony to the prevalence of his professed opinion, however, is given a quarter of a century later by Dorothy Osborne, who, humorously condemning a letter of her own, remarks:

there are many pretty things shuffled together which would do better

<sup>1</sup> *Note.* The foot-note references are in each case to the edition mentioned in the Bibliography, unless a different edition is explicitly named. Two slightly different editions of the *Verney Memoirs* have been used, and therefore in each reference to this work the date of the edition used is given.

<sup>2</sup> *Camb. Hist. of Eng. Lit.*, vol. vii, pp. 188-9.

<sup>3</sup> *Howell*, ed. Repplier, vol. i, p. 1.



spoken than in a letter, notwithstanding the received opinion that people ought to write as they speak (which in some sense I think is true).<sup>1</sup>

Ten years later a certain Dorothy Turner in a judicious little letter gives expression to a somewhat similar opinion:

Deare sister,

I take it very kindly as a great evidence of your love to me that you so suddenly answered my unworthy lines. I know not how it is with others but I for my part highly prize those lines that express affection though ther be nothing of news nor Rethorick, such are mine and I hope will find favour with you only on this score of true and hearty love. I have not as yet had any cause from you to doubt the contrary.<sup>2</sup>

Dorothy Turner's scope may seem narrow, but she had grasped the secret of all good letter-writing, that it must be based on intimate friendliness or affection between the correspondents. Many of the Letters studied have a wider interest than that attaching to the simple expression of 'true and hearty love'. Some have a political value; some are interesting as models of style. But in all, the personal element is the informing spirit, and gives its character to the whole. As a late nineteenth-century critic has put it: 'The basis of style is intellectual and moral education; its superstructure is individuality; and neither the one nor the other is inconsistent with the artlessness which epistolary success demands.'<sup>3</sup>

The Diaries, though slightly more formal in origin and method, share in this invaluable artlessness. Some, like those of Pepys or the Cavalier diarist, Richard Symonds, are simple jottings of passing events; some are collected reminiscences, such as that of the country squire Sir John Bramston; some pure autobiography, such as those of Lady Halkett and the great Chancellor. But even Clarendon's, probably the least personal of all those studied, in the sense that it deals with historic events from the point of view of an active participator in them, has the intimate touch. He writes to defend his own character and to provide an interest for himself in the monotony of exile, and he deals in even greater detail with distinctly private family matters, with his friendships and his interests, than with State affairs. The *Memoirs* of Lady Fanshawe are a personal biography, addressed to her only surviving son; while the *Diary* of Lady Warwick is a purely private record of self-examination.

The Letters and Diaries show a love of figurative speech. What to the modern mind would appear as affectation, to the seventeenth-century mind seems to have been the normal mode of

<sup>1</sup> *Letters of Dorothy Osborne*, p. 225.

<sup>2</sup> Add. MS. 11314. Letter to Mrs. Elizabeth Martyn.

<sup>3</sup> D. R. Rannie, *Letter-Writing as a Form of Literature*, p. 6.



expression. A twist of thought gives to a simple statement a metaphorical glamour, which is intended to enrich both thought and style. In some cases the process is too deliberate and an over-elaborate artificiality is the result. Sympathy for a friend in sickness loses its genuine force when thus expressed:

As Cowards my Lord dar not open their Eyes till y<sup>e</sup> danger be past,  
I durst not soe much as enquire after your Health till I heard of y<sup>r</sup>  
Recoverie.<sup>1</sup>

A Mr. T. Rosse sends an absent friend the following description of his life in England:

As to my selfe I live the same hermit's life you left mee in, and exposed to the foxes of the wilderness who are still devouring my little branches, but I endeavour to defend myself with a weapon which they always wanted, which is honesty, an exorcisme against all their devills that befriend them must submitt to.<sup>2</sup>

This intricacy of language probably pleased the writer with a sense of ingenuity, while the confusion of metaphor passed unnoticed, but the complaint lacks the vigour of spontaneity. Less obtrusive, but illustrative of the same tendency, is Francis Cornwallis's protestation to Sir Kenelm Digby that he would ere this have visited him

but that some affaires (the devill my great Enemy will e're be venting his Malevolincy) has perpetually intervened, and the greatest Malice he can e're shew (but I hope to fortifie myself by growing daily a better Christian then he takes me to be) will be to sow tares in that friendship (w<sup>ch</sup> I reckon upon, as one of my cheefest happineses) that I've w<sup>th</sup> you.<sup>3</sup>

This sentence is also an example of the seventeenth-century love of parenthesis which often results in harshness of style and obscurity of sense, and to these points we shall return. More elaborately sustained than the metaphor of the last-quoted extract, yet much more effective, is Sir Thomas Player's humorous description of the English Government in 1673:

The truth is, this yeare the Government begins to thrive marvellous well, for it eats and drinks and sleeps as heartily as I have knowne it, nor doth it vex and disquiet itselfe with that foolish, idle, impertinent thing called businesse.<sup>4</sup>

This image evidently pleased the writer for in his next letter six weeks later he carries it on:

In my last I thinke I acquanted your Ex<sup>cy</sup> that the government of London was asleepe, and in a deepe one, for it is not yet awake; the truth is 'tis soe quiett 'tis pittie to awake it.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Reresby to Halifax. Foxcroft, vol. i, p. 123.

<sup>2</sup> *Letters to Sir Joseph Williamson*, vol. i, p. 155.

<sup>4</sup> *Letters to Sir Joseph Williamson*, vol. i, p. 133.

<sup>5</sup> *Letters to Sir Joseph Williamson*, vol. ii, p. 161.

<sup>3</sup> Add. MS. 38175.



Halifax is another exponent of the metaphorical style, which in his hands seldom fails of effectiveness and never degenerates into mere verbal ingenuity. In his *Advice to a Daughter*, written with some regard to literary qualities, passages such as the following constantly arrest the attention and drive home his lucid reasoning:

A virtue stuck with bristles is too rough for this age; it must be adorned with some flowers or else it will be unwillingly entertained, so that even where it may be fit to strike, do it like a lady, gently.<sup>1</sup>

To ridicule the world

is like throwing snowballs against Bullets.<sup>2</sup>

If friends are chosen unwisely,

it is like our houses being in the power of a drunken or careless neighbour; only so much worse as that there will be no Insurance here to make you amends, as there is in the case of fire.<sup>3</sup>

The same tendency appears in the private letters of Halifax. Referring to his unpopularity in Parliament in 1681, he tells his brother:

I must venture to go into the storm, and receive the shot once more of an angry House of Commons, unless they should by a miracle grow into a better temper than is naturally expected from them.<sup>4</sup>

This habit of thought and expression is typical of women as well as men. The simple acknowledgement of a service done is phrased thus by Grace Bokenham, sister of Sir Simonds D'Ewes:

Gladly would I expres more then paper expressions of arye thinne acknowledgements for so ponderous a benefit.<sup>5</sup>

Lucy Hutchinson in her grief for her dead husband slips naturally into a metaphorical strain:

if our tears did not put out our eyes we should see him even in heaven, holding forth his flaming lamp of virtuous examples and precepts, to light us through the dark world.<sup>6</sup>

Lady Fanshawe records the death of her husband in language strikingly simple :

On the  $\frac{15^{\text{th}}}{25}$ , being Tuesday, my husband was taken ill with an ague, but turned to a malignant inward fever, of which he lay until the 26th of the same month, being Sunday, until eleven of the Clock at night, and then departed this life, fifteen days before his intended journey to England.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Halifax, *Advice to a Daughter*, p. 131.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 127.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 124.

<sup>4</sup> Foxcroft, *Life and Letters*, vol. ii, p. 277.

<sup>5</sup> Harl. MS. 382, p. 148.

<sup>6</sup> *Memoirs of Colonel Hutchinson*, p. 18.

<sup>7</sup> *Memoirs*, p. 218.



But her lament for Charles I, while expressing a sorrow obviously genuine and deep, is phrased in awkward metaphor:

Thus did we part from that glorious sun, that within a few months after was murdered, to the grief of all Christians that were not forsaken by God.<sup>1</sup>

It is interesting to notice the prevalence of metaphorical phrases, most of which are in use in our own day, but some of which have undergone modification. It will be convenient to summarize the evidence on this point by tabulating the most striking examples collected. In certain cases it will be noted that the example is of an earlier date than the first instance of it given in the *New English Dictionary*.

A. *Phrases identical with those of the present day.*

To be even with. 'I shall *be even with* you for your short letter.'  
Dorothy Osborne, p. 243, c. 1654.  
Young men during the Commonwealth were  
'too impatient to revenge their death, or *to be even with* their oppressors'.  
Clarendon, *Life (Continuation)*, p. 15, 1672.

The face to. 'It will never enter into my head that 'tis possible any woman should love where she is not first loved, and much less that if they should do that, they could have *the face to* own it.' Dorothy Osborne, p. 208, c. 1654.  
Cp. "'Twas hard for me now to have *the face to* pray to this Christ for mercy, against whom I had thus vilely sinned.'  
Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, p. 77. [Cassell, 1887.]

A feather in one's cap. '*A feather in my capp*, a warrant to be sworn in ordinary with a Reserve of my Priority and Seniority.'  
*Verney Memoirs*, vol. iv, p. 7 (1892), 1661.

Featherone's nest. 'I perceive, as he told me, were it not that Mr. Coventry had already *feathered his nest* in selling of places, he do like him very well.'  
Pepys, 7 June 1662.

Have by the ears. 'I doubt Mun will *have him by the eares* . . . and I doubt be the death of him.'  
*Verney Memoirs*, vol. ii, p. 332 (1892), 1648.

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 76.



- For Gospel. 'This I dare not affirme *for gossell*.'  
*Letters to Sir Joseph Williamson*, vol. i, p. 73, 1673.  
 [N.E.D. First example identical with this is 1678.]
- Into the bargain. The carrier 'framed a fine Lye *into the bargain*'.  
*Verney Memoirs*, vol. iv, p. 195 (1892), c. 1668.  
 [N.E.D. Only example 1674, and meaning there is not altogether metaphorical. 'He paid much too dear for his wife's fortune, by taking her person *into the bargain*.'  
 One example (1636) with 'to' instead of 'into', but again not wholly metaphorical.]
- Kick at. 'I . . . proposed Lord Halifax as one of the Lords, whom the King . . . indeed *kicked at*, in our first consultation, more than any of the rest.' Foxcroft, vol. i, pp. 146-7, 1679.
- Long home. Twysden's shortness of breath reminds him daily 'of my *long home*'. MS. Letters, 1665.
- Nose out of joint. Of the new Queen, men say 'that the King is pleased enough with her, which, I fear, will put Madam Castlemaine's *nose out of joynt*'.  
 Pepys, 31 May 1662.
- Peck of troubles. 'The poor man is delivered out of *a peck of troubles*.'  
 Lady Russell, p. 42, 1679.
- Pullinone's horns. 'The Bishop and the Colonel *pulled in their horns*.'  
 Prideaux, p. 74, 1679.
- Save one's bacon. Highwayman Hals thinks his last reprieve may 'still *save my bacon*'.  
*Verney Memoirs*, vol. iv, p. 312 (1892), 1675.  
 [N.E.D. First example 1691.]
- Smell a rat. 'I *smell a rat*.'  
*Diary of Henry Sidney*, p. 87, 1679.
- Tooth and nail. Edmund Verney is '*tooth and nayle* for the King's cause'.  
*Verney Memoirs*, vol. ii, p. 137 (1892), 1643.
- Under the rose. '*Under the rose* be it spoken.'  
*Verney Memoirs*, vol. i, p. 233 (1892), 1636.  
 '*Under the rose* I have noe faith in Rumpe Major.'  
*Verney Memoirs*, vol. iii, p. 469 (1892), 1660.



- Upon thorns. 'Thus *upon thorns* he stayed.'  
Lady Fanshawe, p. 74, 1676.
- Virtue of necessity. 'to suffer patiently what is imposed, making a  
*virtue of necessity*'.  
Dorothy Osborne, p. 213, c. 1654.
- White boy. 'one of her *white boyes*'.  
*Verney Memoirs*, vol. iii, p. 146 (1892), 1650.
- Will for the deed. 'Accept of *the will for the deed*'.  
Lady Anne Sunderland, p. 41, 1679.
- With a vengeance. A process 'will make him bring in his mony  
*with a vengeance*'. Prideaux, p. 5, 1674.

B. *Phrases which have undergone modification.*

- True colours. 'He had formerly made Secretary Windebank  
appear in *his colours*'.  
Lady Fanshawe, p. 61, 1676.  
[*N.E.D.* Only one example identical with this,  
1688.]
- In all conscience. 'the King neglects the Duke of Monmouth  
enough of *all conscience*'.  
*Diary of Henry Sidney*, p. 207, 1679.
- Ears burn. Temple having been the subject of conversa-  
tion: 'Sure, if there be any truth in the old  
observation, your *cheeks* glowed notably.'  
Dorothy Osborne, p. 159, c. 1653.  
[*N.E.D.* No example.]
- Play the fool. Ralph has '*played the bird called the goose*'.  
*Verney Memoirs*, vol. ii, p. 221 (1892) 1644.  
[*N.E.D.* One example almost identical with  
this, 1655.]
- Take to one's heels. Lady Shrewsbury 'took her heels'.  
*Savile Correspondence*, p. 22, 1667.

The very general use of proverbs in familiar correspondence is a remarkable feature of the period. It gives force and point to the letters and probably derives from the same source as the taste for metaphorical expression. Again the evidence will be summarized under two headings, the collection of proverbs differing from their modern form being best grouped apart. Two interesting proverbs make their appearance, one forty years and the other a century and a half earlier than the first examples recorded in the *New English Dictionary*.



A. *Proverbs identical with modern form.*

Ill news flies fast. 'I was afeard of every letter I received, knowing that *ill newes flys fast* from all hands wher soe many have a Concerne.'

Foxcroft, vol. i, p. 123, 1675.

[*N.E.D.* First example 1821.]

The moon is made of green cheese. 'the ☾<sup>1</sup> *was made of green cheese*'.

*Verney Memoirs*, vol. iii, p. 451 (1892), 1659.

Out of the frying pan into the fire. 'They fell *out of the frying pan into the fire*'.

Hodgson, p. 136, 1683.

Roland for an Oliver. 'There 's a *Rowland for your Oliver*'.

*Verney Memoirs*, vol. iii, p. 207 (1892), 1656.

[*N.E.D.* First example identical with this is 1696, and thereafter always in this form. First example given is in reverse order 'an Oliver for a Roland' (1612).]

B. *Proverbs identical with modern meaning, but differing from modern form.*

Birds of a feather flock together. 'Remember the proverb—*such as his company is, such is the man*.' Lady Fanshawe, p. 34, 1676.

Finger in every pie. 'an Oar in every Boat'.

Slingsby, *Father's Legacy*, p. 209, 1658.

It's a long lane that has no turning. 'He goeth far that never turnes.'

*Verney Memoirs*, vol. iii, p. 151 (1892), 1653.

'Never long that comes at last.'

Teonge, p. 265, 1678.

More haste worse speed. 'Our haste brought us woe.'

Lady Fanshawe, p. 98, 1676.

Out of sight out of mind. 'Out of the roade out of the world.'

*Verney Memoirs*, vol. i, p. 199 (1925), 1640.

Take time by the forelock. 'Now sedition was ripe, and they *took occasion by the forelock*.'

Bramston, p. 71, 1682.

Almost exactly identical with the modern form is the proverb 'As long as there is life thers hopes'; *Hatton Correspondence*, p. 21, 1661.

The Letters and Diaries show a marked disregard for logical and even for grammatical construction. This in itself suggests the conclusion already drawn from other evidence, that the writers had no intention of publication. The thought is allowed to run freely on just as it passes through the writer's mind, clause after clause being added haphazard, with no attempt at co-ordination. Writing of this sort is sometimes held to be especially feminine, and we shall see that the women furnish us with many examples, but the other

<sup>1</sup> This symbol is used instead of the word 'moon'.



sex is by no means unrepresented, and some of the masculine irregularities excel in obscurity. An unfortunate Mrs. Mary Stradling's distresses, though heavy, cannot be held solely responsible for the amusing juxtaposition of her children and her furniture, nor for the elliptical construction of her final clause:

I have but a bare joynture, and that nott great nor anything left mee w<sup>th</sup>outt doores, nor w<sup>th</sup>in any kind of furniture, but three sonnes and five daughters, altogether unprovided for by their father: how low I have lived to seeke to provide in some measure to keepe them from want after my deceas, were butt to add to y<sup>r</sup> trouble.<sup>1</sup>

A Lady Mundeford in her horror at the King's execution writes with wild disregard of syntax:

That horrid act of murdering our good King, whos hart cannot but morne that consider his Innocency and ther Cruelty.<sup>2</sup>

Lady Anne Sunderland's syntax is equally eccentric. She reassures Evelyn as to

12 pound 2 shilling which I have ready for you and which indeed I went away in such a hurey that though I had told your man to call heer I quite forgott it for which careless trick I pray forgive mee.<sup>3</sup>

When giving instructions for her building operations, her excitement causes her to pile clause on clause with no attempt at ordered construction:

if it be possible to make a place for the case of my chaire to stand that may be covered at the top to keep the wett of and to lay any thin wood upon it, if you can compass thes things for mee I shall be mighty convenient.<sup>4</sup>

On another occasion she gives instructions for the forwarding of a guest's luggage: 'What things he has to send down let him write on them his name.'<sup>5</sup> This sentence illustrates her disregard of the natural order of words, which is further amusingly exemplified by the statement: 'Our dear boy is all over broke out his face.'<sup>6</sup> Sometimes she writes an elliptical sentence, as when she speaks of her man-servant 'having been and still is sick'.<sup>7</sup> This habit she shares with the metaphysician Lady Conway, who writes, for instance:

This proiect seemes to us so feasible and convenient in all respects, and both Deans gratified by it, that we cannot imagine anything should put a stopp to it.<sup>8</sup>

Such defects of composition add to the charming naturalness of the letters. Construction mattered little to Lady Conway, provided

<sup>1</sup> Add. MS. 38175. Correspondence of Sir Kenelm Digby.

<sup>2</sup> Add. MS. 27400.

<sup>3</sup> Add. MS. 15889, p. 12.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 49.

<sup>7</sup> Add. MS. 15889, p. 4.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 57.

<sup>8</sup> Add. MS. 23214, p. 22.



she made her meaning clear, which she generally succeeded in doing, even in such an involved sentence as

My Lady is very well and gone this day to visit my cosin S. no otherwise to any of us that I know of, then usuall, which is kind enough.<sup>1</sup>

Her disregard of literary style, which to so accomplished a woman must have been more or less familiar, is shown by the impulsive awkwardness of the following statement:

He arrived not here all this day, *which because* I would not be prevented from giving you an account of . . .<sup>2</sup> (*italics mine*).

In the earnestness of her dying appeal to her brother she sends him books 'which I hope, as he shall seriously peruse in the fear of God, may give him satisfaction'.<sup>3</sup> Awkwardnesses of construction occasionally mar the clear and flowing prose of Lady Fanshawe, as when she remarks that 'meat, and fuel, for half the Court to serve them a month was not to be had in the whole island'.<sup>4</sup> Lady Russell's knowledge of grammar entirely deserts her at the close of one of her affectionate outpourings to her absent husband: 'Remembering no more tattle, *and being* nine o'clock, I take my leave.'<sup>5</sup> This noble Lady's style can be clear and straightforward enough when recounting her own or her children's doings, but is often marred by such complexities as these:

I thought he would never have done to one of the ladies, you shall guess which, but I will personate her at this time whom he led by the hand, and after some impertinent questions, whether she would be at home, and when he said he had a favour to ask, but with so much disorder that she quickly suspecting said, he had made an ill choice to ask any favour, since she was never fortunate enough to do anybody a favour in all her life.<sup>6</sup>

When she writes to congratulate young Lady Ogle on her sudden marriage, her misgivings on the subject bring about inextricable confusion of language.

You have my prayers and wishes, dear Lady Ogle, that it may prove as fortunate to you as ever it did to any, and that you may know happiness to a good old age: but, Madam, I cannot think you can *be completely so*, with a misunderstanding *between* so near a relation as a mother<sup>7</sup> (*italics mine*).

The Duchess of Newcastle attempts to defend her literary productions in a sentence the eccentricity of which equals that of her personal appearance.<sup>8</sup>

As soon as I set them [her thoughts] down I send them to those that are

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 37.      <sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 21.      <sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 40.      <sup>4</sup> *Memoirs*, p. 71.

<sup>5</sup> *Letters of Lady Russell*, p. 59.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 59.

<sup>8</sup> Charles Lyttelton, one of the correspondents of the Hatton family, describes her behaviour on one occasion as 'very pleasant but rather to be seene then told. She was dressed in a vest, and, instead of courtesies, made leggs and bows to the ground with her hand and head'. [*Hatton Correspondence*, p. 47.]



to transcribe them, and fit them for the press; whereof, since there have been several, and amongst them such as only could write a good hand, but neither understood orthography, nor had any learning (I being then in banishment, with your lordship, and not able to maintain learned secretaries,) which hath been a great disadvantage to my poor works, and the cause that they have been printed so false and so full of errors; for besides that I want also skill in scholarship and true writing, I did many time not peruse the copies that were transcribed, lest they should disturb my following conceptions; by which neglect, as I said, many errors are slipt into my works, which, yet I hope, learned and impartial men will soon rectify, and look more upon the sense than carp at words.<sup>1</sup>

It seems hard to use this candid defence as an example of the 'errors' it deplores, but the sentence is too characteristic to be omitted. The remarkable Duchess herself, in her haste to secure her original 'conceptions', could not have composed a more curious sentence than the following mysterious allusion by Charles Lyttelton to the circumstances of his wife's death:

And there are some [i. e. stories] concerning that poor girle w<sup>ch</sup> by the appearance of other transactions you cannot suspect, I have soe much reason as I have to hate and will make you doe soe too (but for the present I must be silent) somebody that I have bin necessitated (I confesse basely enough) to acknowledge to the world my self most obliged; and yet I have something to palliate the matter in theyr behalf; if unheard of pride and inhumane discourtesy to a lady of her meritt may be allowed of, because it wanted the mallice to be purpossely acted to her prejudice.<sup>2</sup>

At a second or third reading the sense of this passage becomes tolerably clear, but takes no account of either grammar or punctuation. As another instance of masculine disregard of syntax, we may take a lengthy sentence of Sir John Bramston:

And here let me mention alsoe what Grimston told me on the bench at Chelmsford, at a special commission of Oyer and Terminer for tryall of some soulders, whoe had broke into the church at Easterford-Kelvedon, burnt the rayles about the communion table, stolen the surplice and the church plate, or some of it, my father sittinge there as judge, and his father, Sir Harbotle, Sir William Hicks, Sir Thomas Barrington, Sir William Masham, and I should have sayd first, the Earle of Warwicke, as justices and commissioners, whoe all had letters from the Lords of the Councell, requiringe their attendance, which they lookt upon as a marke sett upon themselves, because the Lord Mainard, Sir Benjamin Ayloff, Sir Henry Mildmay of Moulsham, and others had noe letters, only generall notice; and they at dinner were very earnest, I remember, with my father to know the reason, but he sayd they must enquire that of the Lords not of him.

<sup>1</sup> Scoones, *Four Centuries of English Letters*, pp. 117-18.

<sup>2</sup> *Hatton Correspondence*, p. 312.



It is small wonder that Bramston himself here feels the necessity of a full stop and a fresh beginning. 'But to goe on with my storie.'<sup>1</sup> Humphrey Prideaux, an Oxford don, can perpetrate a statement such as the following:

Ammianus Marcellinus, which, although to his language is very barbarous, is however a most excellent writer.<sup>2</sup>

James Vernon gives Sir Joseph Williamson the awkwardly-expressed information that 'the King hath granted them what boys of his Chappell they shall have occasion for to sing'.<sup>3</sup> Clarendon himself falls into redundant awkwardness: 'the damage by the plague which nobody knew how long it might continue'.<sup>4</sup> Another example of confused writing is the sentence in which Sir Roger Twysden commiserates his son's illness, with its alternation of 'thou' and 'you', and the tendency to throw the preposition to the end of its clause: 'I did desire you in sommer to provide wood for winter, w<sup>ch</sup> you see how much need thou now hast of, and I pray send me word in every particular how thou doest, how your wind is, and what you find most want of.'<sup>5</sup> An interesting sentence is this of John Strype as a University student to his mother: 'The season beginning now to hasten towards Winter, and a coat I shall have great occasion for.'<sup>6</sup> This loose placing of the preposition is a fault common to many of the writers. Lady Anne Sunderland writes: 'this trouble I have given you which I cannot now add anything more to',<sup>7</sup> and Lady Conway remarks that her brother is going to Padua 'to enjoy his thoughts which he hath been so long diverted from'.<sup>8</sup>

Some common grammatical peculiarities of the colloquial writers may conveniently be grouped here.

#### I. *Use of the Infinitive for the Present Participle.*

'there being little comfort, God wot, *to breathe* (= in breathing) English air'. Howell, vol. ii, p. 426, 1646.

'which makes me think myself very unfortunate *to have* (= having) all my letters miscary.' Lady Conway, p. 39, 1657.

It 'shall necessitate *him to spend* (= his spending) at the least one yeare in Italy'. Ibid., p. 17, 1658.

'He is in great hopes *to be returned* (= of returning) againe with you to London.' Ibid., p. 15, 1658.

'I desire you would do me the favour *to buy* (= of buying) them. Ibid., p. 25, 1664.

<sup>1</sup> *Autobiography*, p. 76.

<sup>2</sup> Prideaux, *Letters to Ellis*, p. 65.

<sup>3</sup> *Letters to Sir Joseph Williamson*, vol. i, p. 181.

<sup>4</sup> Clarendon, *Life (Continuation)*, p. 283.

<sup>5</sup> Add. MS. 34161.

<sup>6</sup> Ellis, *Letters of Literary Men*, p. 180.

<sup>7</sup> Add. MS. 15889, p. 25.

<sup>8</sup> Add. MS. 23214, p. 17.



'Sir James Halkett seldome missed *to be* (= being) one.'

Lady Halkett, c. 1674, p. 78.

Another curious use, this time of the perfect infinitive, is:

'They impeacht him *of traiterously to have assumed* the regall power to himself.' Lady Anne Sunderland, p. 28, 1678.

## II. *Use of the Present Participle.*

(a) The Present Participle is sometimes used for the Past Participle.

'with regard to the army at this time *levying*'.

Reresby, p. 176, c. 1660.

'I met a dead corps of the plague, in the narrow ally, just *bringing* down a little pair of stairs.' Pepys, 15 Aug. 1665.

'a great deal of mony being now *expendeing* on St. Mary's'.  
Prideaux, p. 50, 1676.

'there being much robbery daily *committing*'.

Lady Fanshawe, p. 117, 1676.

(b) The Present Participle after 'in order to'.

'I was willing to speake with my lord *in order to puting* of (= off) this.' Lady Anne Sunderland, p. 4, 1674.

Woodruff 'talketh what he will do *in order to the reforming* of the house'.  
Prideaux, p. 26, 1674.

Cp. 'what he communicated freely to me *in order to* his estate or family'.  
Lady Fanshawe, p. 67, 1676.

An example of the Present Participle used for the Infinitive is:

'It is out of my province *writing* on thes matters.'  
Lady Anne Sunderland, p. 29, 1678.

## III. *The Past Participle.*

This is sometimes used as in Latin:

'The news is certaine for Portugal *revolted*'.

Rous, p. 113, 1640.

'after the first time *excepted*'. Lady Fanshawe, p. 107, 1676.

## IV. *Construction with the Present Participle of the Verb 'to be'.*

This is frequently used in a causal sense, equivalent to 'because' or 'since'.

Lady Conway writes to her absent husband that a Mr. Gee brought a box of documents which was to be opened 'when you were present and Sir Or. Bridgeman, w<sup>ch</sup> *being* not to be done now (= since it cannot be done now), they have agreed (Mr. Gee *being* this day to returne to his lord) yt the box shall be left untouched.'  
Lady Conway, p. 5, 1655.



'I *being* to receive it all'. Ibid., p. 36, 1655.

'*Beeing* then about another (servant) w<sup>ch</sup> I did yesterday take.' Ibid., p. 19, 1659.

'He *being* to be there the next day, would effectually doe his businesse for him.' Prideaux, p. 43, 1675.

He 'bade me trust God with him, as he did me, in whose mercy he hoped, *being* upon that duty he was obliged to'.

Lady Fanshawe, p. 103, 1676.

Cp. 'Let me have yr. company to-morrow *being* Sunday.'

Lady Anne Sunderland, p. 6, 1676.

#### V. Use of a singular Verb with a Plural Noun.

e. g. 'There is not any letters as yet come to you.'

Lady Conway, p. 12, 1657.

'The banes ( = banns) . . . *was* forbidden.'

Ibid., p. 39, 1657.

'The rest (of the horses) *continues* well.' Ibid., p. 23, 1663.

'The apprehensions of her quitting me so suddenly *doth* so much perplex me.' Ibid., p. 22, 1663.

'There is no hopes.'

Ibid.

'If any of my friends *seems* to take it ill I doe not write.'

Ibid., p. 32, 1664.

'My Lord's affaires *has* been such.'

Lady Anne Sunderland, p. 7, 1676.

'An impeachment containing 5 articks, the 2 first which they built most upon *was* what Mr Montagus letters furnisht.'

Ibid., p. 28, 1678.

Two ladies '*desires* their service may be sent you and *joins* with mine to yr. lady'.

Ibid., p. 55, 1680.

Cp. 'The News of this week *have* been like the waves of that boisterous sea.'

Howell, vol. ii, p. 430, 1644.

#### VI. The Use of Adjective for Adverb.

'*Huge* gentlemanlike.'

Verney Memoirs, vol. iii (1892), p. 153, 1653.

'This *extreame* sickly time.' Lady Conway, p. 15, 1658.

'All of us hadd *inevitable* been drowned.'

Lady Halkett, p. 104, c. 1674.

'She is a *perfect* good judg.'

Lady Anne Sunderland, p. 13, 1676.

'I have bin *extrem* ill.'

Ibid., p. 37, 1679.



VII. *The Relative Pronoun.*

## (a) Omission of Relative.

'Monk has a brother lives in Cornwall.'

Dorothy Osborne, p. 140, 1653.

'the care you have taken in enquiring after the cure was related to you' (= which was related).

Lady Conway, p. 39, 1657.

'I have sent you enclosed all the letters came by the last post.'

Ibid., p. 36, 1665.

'It is nott true she says' (= what she says).

Lady Halkett, p. 50, c. 1674.

'They had a discreet woman attended them.' Ibid., p. 39.

'I beseech God it may produce ye efects is hoped for from it.'

Lady Anne Sunderland, p. 15, 1677.

'I share in any affliction befalls you.' Ibid., p. 51, 1680.

Cp. 'A matter never known to have happened before, and that has no other excuse but "le mauvais temps".'

*Savile Correspondence*, p. 36, 1673.

*Note.* The practice of indicating omission of the relative by a comma does not seem to be common as late as our period. Mr. Percy Simpson's latest example is 1643.<sup>1</sup>

## (b) Use of 'that' and 'which' for 'who'.

'the coachman *that* he is to hire yr horses of'.

Lady Conway, p. 39, 1657.

'cologue my lord duke out of proposing a menial servant of his own before your brother, *that* was known in the country'.

*Savile Correspondence*, p. 25, 1670.

'Beeing then about another (servant) *which* I did yesterday take.'

Lady Conway, p. 19, 1659.

'My father's new wife, *which* he had then married.'

Lady Fanshawe, p. 69, 1676.

Cp. 'They keep their reserve in case of dearth or scarcity, *what* it seems they have often suffered under.'

Reresby, p. 42, c. 1660.

It appears from these examples that weak construction and faulty grammar are common to both men and women writers at this time, but especially to the women. We have seen also a great deal of wordiness on the part of both sexes, and this is characteristic of epistolary style even where there is no syntactical offence. Attention was drawn to the weighty parentheses in a letter of Francis

<sup>1</sup> Simpson, *Shakespearian Punctuation*, p. 56 (Clarendon Press, 1911).



Cornwallis to Sir Kenelm Digby (p. 5), and the same wordy device is typical of Clarendon, both in his *Life* and in his letters. Mr. Percy Simpson<sup>1</sup> has pointed out that Shakespeare's printer adopted brackets to avoid grammatical ambiguity. Their use in our period may be a legacy from the Elizabethans, but our examples will show a tendency to employ them simply as an outlet for instinctive wordiness or a way of avoiding the trouble of splitting up a lengthy sentence. A passage from a letter to Lord Witherington will serve as illustration:

If you find that his Lordship himself may not be prevailed with to adorn these actions with his own incomparable style (which indeed would render them fit to be bound up with the other commentaries) vouchsafe I beseech your Lordship, that by your means I may be trusted with such counsels and occurrences as you shall judge fit to be submitted to the ill apparel I shall be able to supply them with; which I will take care (how simple soever) shall not defraud them of their due integrity which will be ornament enough.<sup>2</sup>

Even in an account of plain facts this love of parenthesis is apparent.

This afternoone a very sober marchant was with me and told me that with this fleet was arrived the Humphrey and Elizabeth (a ship of 40 guns sent out by the East India Company in November last with recruits for the fort at [St.] Helena) and the Suratte marchant man of 26 guns from the East Indies, that the captain of the former advises that he, togeather with the said Suratte marchant, were at St Helena when three Dutch men-of-war, fitted out at the Cape of Good Hope by the Dutch, arrived there, and that they were in fight with them one whole day till evening, when the Dutch (while our ships expected to engage them againe the next morning) gott to the other side of the island and in the night landed 700 men, who without any difficulty made themselves masters of the fort; upon which the Humphry and Elizabeth togeather with the Suratte took their course to Brasile, where they hired a small vessell to goe out and meet our East India ships, that are comeing home to give them notice of what had happened, and so proceeded homeward.<sup>3</sup>

This extract, while illustrating the weakness of parenthesis, illustrates too the lucidity attainable even in so long a sentence. The faults of these writers are counterbalanced by their corresponding virtues. Bramston may be guilty of a hopelessly involved and lengthy sentence, but when he wishes to give a clear and succinct narrative, he can do it in these terms:

From him I came to Mr Farnabie, whoe taught school in a garden house in Goldsmyths' allie, a fine airie place; he had ioyned two or three

<sup>1</sup> loc. cit., pp. 91-2.

<sup>2</sup> Scoones, *Four Centuries of English Letters*, p. 100.

<sup>3</sup> *Letters to Sir Joseph Williamson*, vol. i, pp. 8-9.



gardens and houses togeather, and had a great manie boarders and towne schollars, soe manie that he had 2, somtymes three, ushers besides himselfe. I boarded with him, though my father lived then in Philip lane, very near the schoole. . . . With him I stayed more than two, nay, full three yeares. At partinge, he shewed me my first and last theames, and sayd, 'Thus you came, and thus you goe; God speed you!'<sup>1</sup>

There could not be a more lucid and straightforward statement of the facts. The length of a sentence did not necessarily impede a seventeenth-century writer from marshalling its component parts into a logical whole. Temple can produce a perfectly clear statement of considerable length, by the use of judicious balance and emphasis. On his part in the Triple Alliance treaty, he writes to Halifax:

The reflections I make upon what you say, and what I hear from other hands of the same kind, carry me only to consider how much by chance, and how unequally, persons and things are judged at a distance, and make me apprehend, from so much more applause than is my due upon this occasion, that upon the next I may meet with as much more blame than I deserve; as one seldom has a great run of cards which is not followed by an ill one, at least gamesters that are no luckier than I.<sup>2</sup>

Algernon Sidney, writing in some emotion and considerable bitterness, produces prose as admirably knit as Hamlet's famous letter to Horatio.

My Lord,

I have bin long doubtfull of my condition in England, wavering betweene the opinions expressed by somme of my friends, in their letters, and my owne. The letters of the tow last posts have put me out of that uncertainty, and shew me plainely what I am to expect. . . . I choose this voluntary exile, as the least evill condition that is within my reach. It is bitter, but not soe much soe, as the others that are in my prospect. I am in an ill condition to make a long journey; if I came into England, and stayed a moneth or tow, I should be in a worse, and perhaps not able to come away, when I desire it. I have not yet resolved upon the place of my residence; but I dislike all the drunken countries of Germany, and the north, and am not much inclined to France. I think I shall choose Italy.<sup>3</sup>

We have many examples of this type of close-knit, nervous prose, showing that the letter-writers of the period, for all their frequent slovenliness of style, were of the generation of Dryden. Tillotson, asked for advice as to whether a person may change his living, gives his opinion in highly business-like terms.

Honord Sir,

I am sorry that I did not know of your being in town that I might

<sup>1</sup> *Autobiography*, pp. 101-2.

<sup>2</sup> Scoones, *Four Centuries of English Letters*, p. 127.

<sup>3</sup> *Sidney Papers* (ed. Blencowe), p. 191.



have paid my respects to you at your lodgings. It is upon Mr Brabant's request that I now give you this trouble. . . . I know that our Law calls a man's Living his wife, but there is no arguing from similitudes, if the reason be not equal in both cases, which I confess I do not see.<sup>1</sup>

Marvell compresses an account of the royal financial transactions into a series of brief sentences, almost telegraphic in their emphasis.

The King had occasion for sixty thousand pounds. Sent to borrow it of the city. Sterlin, Robinson, and all the rest of that faction, were at it many a week, and could not get above ten thousand. The fanatics, under persecution, served his Majesty. The other part, both in court and city, would have prevented it. But the King protested money would be acceptable. So the King patched up, out of the Chamber, and other ways, twenty thousand pounds. The fanatics, of all sorts, forty thousand. The King, though against many of his Council, would have the Parliament sit this twenty-fourth of October. He, and the Keeper spoke of nothing but to have money. Some one million three hundred thousand pounds, to pay off the debt at interest; and eight hundred thousands for a brave navy next Spring. . . . There is like to be a terrible riot of Conventicles. The Prince of Orange here is made much of. The King owes him a great deal of money. The Paper is full.<sup>2</sup>

Such vigour, without its exaggerated brevity, is characteristic also of Henry Teonge, a breezy naval chaplain, whose *Diary* is full of graphic little pictures such as the following:

Now very often the seas breake over our waste, and com in at our scuttles, and doe us som small injurys. Now our tables and chayres are lashed fast to the boardes; our dishes held on the table, and our bottles of wine held in our hands.<sup>3</sup>

Delightful in its plain vigour is the complacent remark of a certain Sir Francis Chaplin on a troublesome opponent's fate:

In the citty they sum time sins chose one Mead, a Quaker, Sheriff, who with his party did intend to give the Citty a great troble, but we put on a good resolution and turned him off and sent him to Newgate for his rudnes to the Court, and now the gentleman is a little tamer.<sup>4</sup>

No letters of the period can exceed those of Prideaux for forcefulness of language towards those whom he dislikes or despises. Pembroke is 'the fittest colledge in town for brutes';<sup>5</sup> a foolish friend 'is furiously about to print'<sup>6</sup> a seaman's journal; and he disrespectfully remarks of his Principal who has been complaining of the collectors of chimney money, 'the old fool hath been forced to pay the money'.<sup>7</sup> A similar energy of phrase was employed by Sir Nicholas Armourer when, disregarding the important mission

<sup>1</sup> Ellis, *Letters of Literary Men*, pp. 192-3.

<sup>2</sup> Scoones, *Four Centuries of English Letters*, pp. 111-12.

<sup>4</sup> *Letters to Sir Joseph Williamson*, vol. ii, p. 18.

<sup>5</sup> *Letters of Prideaux*, p. 3.

<sup>3</sup> *Diary*, p. 27.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52.



on which his correspondent was engaged, he urged him 'for God's sake make hast home with peace or without. I know Cullen (Cologne) is a damed place in winter for folks of your humer.'<sup>1</sup>

The sense of the emphatic possibilities of a well-turned prose sentence sometimes shows itself in a pleasant neatness of phrase, such as that employed by Sir Thomas Player when he humorously laments 'to adde to our sorrows, I heare your Excellency hath sent for winter shooes, by which wee apprehend your stay abroad to be longer than is wish't by your servants here'.<sup>2</sup> Without the humour, but with equal neatness and perfect sense of emphasis, Jeremy Taylor exhorts his bereaved friend John Evelyn:

Sir, if you do not look to it, time will snatch your honour from you, and reproach you for not effecting that by Christian philosophy which time will do alone.<sup>3</sup>

In certain writers this neatness assumes almost epigrammatic force. Tillotson admonishes Shrewsbury, in whose conversion to Protestantism he has had a share,

I am sure you cannot more effectually condemn your own act, than by being a worse man after your profession to have embrac'd a better religion.<sup>4</sup>

And Halifax, to whom the epigrammatic style surely came naturally, can produce a sentence worthy of Bacon:

Generosity wrong placed becometh a Vice.<sup>5</sup>

It has been thought of interest to collect certain miscellaneous phrases used in the Letters and Diaries, for comparison and contrast with those in use in the twentieth century. These will be arranged under three headings.

A. *Common Phrases identical with those of the present day.*

- |                         |  |
|-------------------------|--|
| desperately ill.        | Soldiers looked so ' <i>desperately ill</i> '.<br>Lady Halkett, p. 62, c. 1674.  |
| for fear.               | 'I long to have him gone home to you <i>for fear</i> you want him.'<br>Lady Anne Sunderland, p. 36, 1679.  |
| get off.                | King 'was willing the count (Konigsmark) should <i>get off</i> ' (after his murder of Thynne).<br>Reresby, p. 227, c. 1660.                                |
| to go on<br>(= behave). | 'And so he <i>goeth one</i> to all his antes' (aunts).<br><i>Verney Memoirs</i> , vol. i, p. 217 (1925), 1639.<br>[N.B. <i>N.E.D.</i> First example 1777.] |

<sup>1</sup> *Letters to Sir Joseph Williamson*, vol. ii, p. 27.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. i, p. 135.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 132.

<sup>3</sup> Scoones, p. 106.

<sup>5</sup> *Advice to a Daughter*, p. 94.



To be good at something. 'For History (especially the French) . . . he *is very good at it*'.

*Verney Memoirs*, vol. iii, p. 79 (1892), 1652.

Height of ambition. 'The *height of my ambition* is to have a bricke pent hous.'

Lady Anne Sunderland, p. 15, 1677.

To stick to. 'When all others had yielded themselves to Augustus, he only *stuck to* him.'

Slingsby, *Memoirs*, p. 78, 1658.

She wishes Commons 'would *stick to* the weightyer concerns of our laws and religion'.

Lady Anne Sunderland, p. 27, 1678.

A sentence curiously modern in tone must be quoted in full: 'The few hours we have been parted seem too many to me, to let this first post-night pass, with out giving my dear man a little talk.'

Lady Russell, p. 15, 1675.

#### B. Common Phrases that have undergone modification.

considering. 'He is but a little hurt that is *in considering* what great danger he was in.'

Lady Anne Sunderland, p. 20, 1679.

fits and starts. Ralph is at Claydon only '*by fits and spurts*'.

*Verney Memoirs*, vol. iii, p. 113 (1892), 1653.

for certain. 'Newes that Aragon was revolted from Spain *of certaine*.'

Rous, p. 121, 1640.

Cp. 'The newes is certaine for Portugal revolted.'

*Ibid.*, p. 113, 1640.

keep one's feet. 'They were so shaken they could skarce *hold their feett*' (in earthquake).

Lady Halkett, p. 44, c. 1674.

#### C. Phrases now obsolete.

huffed and shuffled. 'Him they *huffed and shuffled* about, but (as is said) hurt not otherwise.'

Rous, p. 122, 1642.

scandalise one's person. Mildmay maintained that he brought accusation 'not out of any particular unkindness to the petitioner, neither had he any designe to *scandalise his person*, but accordinge to his dutie and loyaltie to your Majestie'.

Bramston, p. 133, 1683.

to snaffle the forlorn. The foot '*snaffled our forlorn* (=overcame the vanguard), and put them to retreat.'

Hodgson, p. 122, 1683.



upon the matter Frequently used by Clarendon, e.g. the Dutch  
 =in fact. 'were sensible enough that they had been  
*upon the matter* betrayed into the war'.

[*N.E.D.* gives definition 'taking the thing as a whole'.]

(*Continuation*), p. 331.

Close study of the Letters and Diaries of the period 1640-80 has yielded some examples of words used at a date earlier than the first examples recorded in the *N.E.D.*, and a few instances of words unrecorded in a special sense. These have been collected, and will be tabulated here.

- Chocked up. ' 'Tis now half *chocked up* with rubbish.'  
 Evelyn's Diary, 7 Feb. 1644.  
 Not recorded in this form with this meaning. For  
*choke up*: 'to block up a channel', *N.E.D.* gives  
 1673, as first instance.
- Cologue. 'You might compliment and *cologue* my lord duke  
 out of proposing' a candidate for Retford.  
 Henry Savile, p. 25, 1670.  
 First recorded instance ('to prevail upon or coax')  
 is 1676.
- Disgruntle. Death of a horse 'doth much *disgruntle* me'.  
*Verney Memoirs*, vol. iii, p. 193 (1892), 1652.  
 First recorded instance is 1682.
- Squelch. The story 'being noised abroad, *squelched* the Coll.'s  
 (colonel's) pretensions'. Prideaux, p. 79, 1679.  
 No recorded instance of this figurative use earlier  
 than 1864.
- Garinosity. '*garinosity* between the Presbyterians and Inde-  
 pendants'. Charles I, 1646.  
 (Marginal note gives 'hatred or animosity'.)  
 No recorded instance.
- Picket. 'I . . . mind not every little *picket* of hers' (=foible).  
*Verney Memoirs*, vol. iii, p. 314 (1892), 1659.  
 No recorded instance.
- Testicated. 'My head is so *testicated* with the times' (=confused).  
*Verney Memoirs*, vol. iii, p. 479 (1892), 1660.  
 No recorded instance.



- N.B.*—De-votee. Edmund Verney styles himself his cousin's 'devotee' (in italics).  
*Verney Memoirs*, vol. iii, p. 333 (1892), 1658.  
*N.E.D.* has 'devote and devotee were used indifferently from c. 1675 to 1725'. First instance in sense of votary (not religious) is 1657.  
 Cp. 'Dr. Taylor (whose devote you must know I am).' Dorothy Osborne, p. 212, c. 1654.
- Purloin. 'Some odd fellows . . . *purloined* them' (children).  
 Howell, vol. ii (ed. Reppier), p. 262, 1643.  
 Only one instance (of 1489) in this sense (i. e. with a person as object).

The Letters and Diaries suggest that in the matter of spelling the sexes were less evenly matched in the seventeenth century than they are to-day. It is true that certain women spell fairly correctly, while certain men spell incredibly badly, but the masculine average is much higher than the feminine, and the men are decidedly more consistent. This admission need not commit us to an acknowledgment of Macaulay's contention that seventeenth-century women entirely neglected education. He declares that

ladies highly born, highly bred, and naturally quick witted, were unable to write a line in their mother tongue without solecisms and faults of spelling such as a charity girl would now be ashamed to commit.<sup>1</sup>

Even if this sweeping condemnation be granted, it is no definite proof of neglected education. We have accounts of the education of girls of the time<sup>2</sup> which suggest that great attention was paid to those branches which were held most necessary and suitable for a maiden of gentle birth. Spelling was of less importance than a knowledge of French, of music and of needlework. In these modern days, good spelling is a commercial asset, but in the seventeenth century women did not need commercial assets and their spelling was good enough for their purposes. Temple probably liked Dorothy Osborne's letters none the less for an occasional quaintness of orthography, and the highly educated Lady Conway could misspell her words with no sense of shame. A collection of some of these spellings may, however, prove of interest.

The MS. Diary of Lady Warwick is an invaluable source of comparison between the spelling of a man and a woman, for her five large volumes were after her death annotated and revised by her domestic chaplain. He scribbles his notes in the margin, or in

<sup>1</sup> Macaulay, vol. i, p. 308 (1866 edition).

<sup>2</sup> That of Lady Fanshawe or Mrs. Hutchinson.



a blank space at the end of a paragraph or even between her lines, and painstakingly crosses out her misspelt words, writing in the correct spelling above. We can thus compare the contemporary spellings of a high-born woman and a man of much lower rank, though probably of some education in virtue of his position. The result is startlingly in favour of the man. The simplest method of arrangement will be to list a selection of representative words in two parallel columns, Lady Warwick's spellings in the first and Mr. Woodroffe's corrections in the second.

haithnieng  
sofuringes  
compleसानie  
cored  
hopeful *aire*  
crisnieng  
aproucch  
intaingegelling

intaiengullments  
sainctyde  
neasisary  
reputianes

askorenor  
strike  
deptares  
copell  
apapleksy  
Mr. Raige  
Mr. harburte  
prosideinges  
neafue  
sorten }  
unsorten }  
mititate  
untorde  
anufe  
comption  
close  
chekorworke  
plaste  
mathenationes  
moredge

heightning  
sufferings  
complacency  
carried  
heir  
Christning  
approach  
entanglements (here the word  
is corrected in itself)

intanglements  
sanctified  
necessary  
tians crossed out and -tations  
written above

a scorner  
strict  
debtors  
couple  
apoplexy  
Wrag  
Herbert  
proceedings  
nephew  
certain  
meditate  
untoward  
enough  
compunction  
clothes  
chequer worke  
placed  
machinations  
marriage



We may note Lady Warwick's erratic methods. 'Intaingegelling' and 'intaiengullments' is a case in point, both very peculiar spellings and neither consistent with the other. She can run two words together, as in 'askorenor', and she can spell proper names with or without a capital letter, just as the fancy takes her. The chaplain's orthography, on the other hand, is extremely good, and his corrections in nearly every case take the form that the word would take in orthodox twentieth-century spelling. Some of his omissions are curious, and can only be accounted for by the heaviness of the task he had set himself in revising his patroness's inconsistencies. He does not correct, among others, 'quiknieng', 'mersyes', or 'spesall' though in 'espesall' the final syllable is crossed out and 'cial' written above.

This source for comparison of spellings is peculiarly valuable, but interesting material can be found elsewhere. The erratic nature of women's spelling can be illustrated by Lady Halkett, who, for instance, quotes a letter from Mr. 'Seymour', spelling the name correctly, and just above refers to him as 'Seamar'. Dame Margaret Herbert writes to Sir Ralph Verney about some 'amell' (enamel) in two separate letters, although before her second she has received a letter from him in which he spells the word correctly. It seems that women did not as a rule take the trouble to consider such questions, or even to notice a divergence between their own practice and that of their correspondents. Yet they can be consistent in their faults. Lady Warwick, for instance, generally spells final '-ings' as '-iengs', though she occasionally uses the variant '-eings', and in the singular keeps to the normal -ing. Lady Halkett almost invariably doubles final t; repentt; itt; preventt; quiett; wentt; impatientt; and sometimes doubles t when medial; suspicion (but cp. occation); writtes; cittisen. Lady Sussex affects the spelling c for initial s and writes cuffer; cuch, beceech. Lady Brilliana Harley's spelling is, like that of Lady Warwick, a law unto herself alone, and in her case there is no Mr. Woodroffe to provide a wholesome contrast. Her spellings can only be judged by a representative list:

a vanimos	(unanimous)
aquesused	(accused)
rwit	(write) always thus spelt
blles	(bless)
resouled	(resolved)
resoulfes	(resolves)
chillderen	(children)
rooat	(root)
deases	(disease)
ends (of Court)	(Inns)



Grasein	(Gray's Inn)
Linconsine	(Lincoln's Inn)
carrage	(carriage)
cairage	
caraige	
carage	
firer	(fire)
excicuted	(executed)
childeischness	(childishness)
condistion	(condition)
sparigous	(asparagus)
theiare	(their)
horsess	(horses)
horrses	
opotion	(opposition)
strentghen	(strengthen)
milica	(militia)
poscibell	(possible)
randevous	(rendezvous)
whas	(was)
Shwsbury	(Shrewsbury)
knwe	(knew)

She spells the proper name Wright sometimes correctly and sometimes Rwit, and writes the following curious sentence, the proper names being obviously identical: 'Mr *Husbands* is married, and a most abundant loueing cuppell they say they are; and old Mrs *Hubbins* is goone to liue with her daughter.'<sup>1</sup>

The only masculine writer who can at all compete with such erratic orthography is a correspondent of Sir Joseph Williamson, Sir Nicholas Armourer. Even he has not so many nor such varied inconsistencies to his credit. He favours doubled consonants; wiffe; houss; doggs; watters; saffest; supply; peasse; peopell; beleffe (belief). Two of his sentences are curious enough for full quotation:

'Here is an office stays for you, and Teague tells mee a wiffe too in the Mall, and hee lickes (likes) her verie well ay Taite and has writ to tee (thee) about it.'

'Dick Talbot and Father Patrick are both marched off, but have left the gallery too crowded with their excellent countrymen, that I am forced to goe fidelling through what shuch shovells off those vipers doe heare God knows' (i. e. though what such shoals of those vipers do here).<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Letters of Lady Brilliana Harley*, p. 141.

<sup>2</sup> *Letters to Sir Joseph Williamson*, vol. ii, p. 27.



Attempts at phonetic spelling are made occasionally by both men and women. Such are: 'quier' and 'quire' (Symonds); 'boarson', alternating with 'boatswaine' (Teonge); 'coxon' (Pepys); 'hickup' (Pepys); 'husfrey' (=housewifery) (Anne Montague: *Hatton Correspondence*); 'inditement' (Rous); 'loare' (=lower) (Teonge); 'Norfuck' (Edmund Verney); 'quintisenc' (Grace Bokenham); 'shier' and 'shiere' (Thomas Browne); 'tordis' (=towards) (Cary Gardiner; *Verney Memoirs*, cp. 'untorde' [Lady Warwick]); 'trihumfe' (Lady Brilliana Harley); 'woch' (=watch) (Peg Elmes: *Verney Memoirs*, cp. wath [Lady Brilliana Harley].)

A collection of varied Place and Proper Name spellings may be added.

Anwicke	(Alnwick)	Lady Halkett
Belcarese	(Balcarres)	Lady Halkett
Belmerinoth	(Balmerino)	Lady Halkett
Bullingbroke		Richard Baxter
Brun Island }	(Burntisland)	'Lady Halkett
Brunt }		
Carlile		Lady Halkett
Schescheere	(Cheshire)	Lady Brilliana Harley
Crismus		Dorothy Leeke ( <i>Verney Memoirs</i> )
Christmas }	(Cirencester)	John Verney
Christmas }		
Sisseter		
Coddisdon		
Cudsden		
Dedfort }	(Dieppe)	Lady Anne Sunderland
Detford (twice) }		
Detford		
Deep		
Diepe		
Diepe		John Rous
Edenborough		Lady Conway
Glames		Mary Verney
'Guybralter, alis }	(Gibraltar)	Ralph Verney
Gibblitore' }		
Gibbletoire		Lady Halkett
Gore	(Gower)	Lady Halkett
Hambleton	(Hamilton)	Lady Halkett
Harridge		Teonge
Kinowle	(Kinnoull)	Lady Halkett
Lumbert St		Lady Hobart ( <i>Verney Memoirs</i> )



Mamsbery		Lady Rochester
Meenes	(Menzies?)	Lady Halkett
Montpeston		Rous
[Mompesson written in margin]		
Plimworth	}	Teonge
Plimmouth		
Plymmouth		
Portsmouth	}	Teonge
Portchmouth		
Roan		{ Clarendon
		{ Evelyn
		{ Edward Browne
Rouen		{ Sir Thomas Browne
		{ Lady Twysden
		{ Edward Browne
Ruterford		Lord Spencer (husband
Tewxbury		of 'Saccharissa')
Weemes	(Wemyss)	Symonds
		{ Lady Conway
Westmester		{ Lady Twysden

Certain eccentricities of spelling can be grouped under recognized laws. There are, for instance, some instances of metathesis, e. g. brithday (Anne Montague); Yatch alternating with yacht (Henry Savile); heigth (Lady Conway, but cp. streight in same letter). There are also curious examples of the transference of final n in 'an' to the following noun if the latter's initial letter be a vowel; e. g. a negg (Pen Denton: *Verney Memoirs*); a nass (a Verney servant); 'a nupper coat' (a Verney servant); a nende and a nothar (Lady Denton: *Verney Memoirs*); a nother (Peg Elmes: *Verney Memoirs*); a nagye (=an ague) (Mrs. Isham: *Verney Memoirs*). A tendency to syncopate final and medial e or i appears with some frequency; e. g. botls (Lady Anne Sunderland); coachs (plural) (Lady Conway); imbrodry and embrodred (Evelyn); letres (Prideaux); pettcoat (Anne Montague); troublsome and troublsomest (Lady Anne Sunderland). Certain words show a great number of variant forms; *Daughter*: dafter (Grace Bokenham, cp. her 'thof' for 'though'); dafter (Mrs. Sherard); dafter (Cary Gardiner). *Lieutenant*: lieftenant (Rous); lieutenant (Lady Halkett); Leiftenant (Symonds); leiftenant (D'Ewes); leiuetenant (Teonge). *Soldier*: soldjer (Symonds); soulder (Lady Brilliana Harley); solger and soulder (Bramston); soelger (Edward Browne); soulder (Lady Twysden). There is a good deal of variety in the addition of g to words with final or medial n, and the reverse process. E.g. Badming-



ton (Symonds); bumking (Lord Windsor: *Hatton Correspondence*); compangione (Anne Montague); drunkeing (Prideaux); Eveling (=Evelyn) (Rous); lennen (Teonge) and linning (Pepys); puddins (child Verney); ribinge (Lady Sussex: *Verney Memoirs*); stockings (Lady Anne Sunderland); tarpaulings (Prideaux).

Finally, there is a collection of what may be described as 'freak' spellings:

aggravacoins		Symonds
yle	(=aisle)	Symonds
agmarine	(aquamarine)	Edward Browne
bocxe		Lady Lucy Stanley (Scoones)
caressing	(=carousing)	Symonds
eclicpes		Grace Bokenham
escocheon	(=escutcheon)	Symonds
harnois (twice)		Lady Conway
aumuliet	(ommelette)	Edward Browne
porselan	}	Evelyn
purselane		
Portmantle		Edward Browne
(cp. portmanteau in letter of his father)		
Valans	(=valance)	Evelyn
vallins	(=valance)	Ralph Verney
yealk	(=yolk)	Evelyn

*Note:* 'a' for 'he' is used always in Henry Verney's letters; 'a' for 'have' once in a letter of Peg Elmes; 'um' for 'them' twice in a letter of Sir Charles Lyttelton.



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